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RUEHJS/AMCONSUL SURABAYA 0098
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 0014
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 SURABAYA 000067

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SUBJECT: EAST JAVA ELECTIONS COMMISSION: ELECTORAL POLITICS AND MUD

REF: SURABAYA 66 (AND PREVIOUS)

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¶1. (SBU) Summary: On October 31, Consulate General Surabaya Pol/Econ Officer and Pol/Econ Assistant met with East Java Provincial Election Commission (KPU) officials. They expressed concern that the mud flow disaster in Porong could affect election logistics for vast areas of East Java. The highway and rail lines linking east to western East Java Province encounter a choke point at the town of Porong. While the mud flow itself routinely causes delays, a greater concern is targeted protests by local residents holding ballot boxes hostage along the way. Elections officials also described the procedural challenges of registering a scattered refugee population and requested U.S. help in automating provincial vote counting. End Summary

¶2. (SBU) During an October 31 meeting, KPU officials expressed concern that the mud flow disaster would have a disastrous impact on election logistics, both in the registration of voters and in the counting of ballots. KPU officials told us that due to the inundation of local village registrars' offices by the mud, vital records needed to prove residence were lost. While procedures exist to produce new documentation, there is no clear systematic means of contacting former residents, since a new voter registration list must be made for each local election under the election law. Not only are most of mudflow victims widely scattered, many are also fearful of losing their right to compensation for their losses by registering elsewhere. KPU officials explained that mud victims could reregister to vote in their new homes, but most do not for fear of losing proof of their former residence. The residence card (or KTP) showing an address now buried under mud is the only evidence many displaced residents have to prove their entitlement to future compensation. While the KTP is sufficient proof of identity in national elections, in provincial elections the voter must have proof of local residence and a new voter registration card.

¶3. (SBU) KPU officials estimated that the number of voters from mud-flow affected areas (excluding the victims of recent dyke

collapses) is around 45,000 (reftel). The East Java KPU has two proposals to handle the problem of registration. First, asking the residents to gather in a district to be registered together as a notional village. Or, all victims could be called to gather in one place and undergo verification of eligibility. There is no basis in election law to justify either solution, however. The KPU requires a new legal umbrella in order to avoid controversy after the 2008 election.

14. (SBU) The deadline for promised compensation payments for mud flow victims is fast approaching. Lapindo must fulfill its obligation to pay the remaining 80% of the emergency leasing support before May 2008, the second anniversary of the disaster.

The East Java gubernatorial election is planned for July 2008. If Lapindo fails to make good on its pledge for compensation, KPU officials believe that thousands of mudflow victims will hold massive demonstrations and block the main roads Surabaya and Sidoarjo with cities to the South and East. A similar demonstration occurred for three full days last year and traffic came to a complete halt. If history is repeated, distribution of blank ballots in advance of the election and the return of completed ballots after the election would be disrupted.

Request for USG Assistance

15. (SBU) KPU officials estimated that they will oversee 65,000 polling booths, and facilitate the voting of approximately 29.4 million voters during the East Java gubernatorial election. Officials told us that distribution and logistics hamper their efforts even in the best of circumstances; many polling places are so remote that it can take up to a week to reach. In the past, the state energy company Pertamina assisted with shipping the ballots. KPU officials are considering requesting assistance from the Indonesian Navy to reach outlying islands. A planned transition from manual to machine counted ballots cannot be made due to a lack of legal foundation. KPU official Arif Budiman asked whether the U.S. Government could help East Java KPU computerize vote counting. Budiman also noted that the

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Japanese Government helped Indonesia in the 2004 national elections by providing ballot boxes, but only 80% of them can be re-used.

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